

REMARKS

This request for reconsideration is filed in response to the Office Action dated December 23, 2009. In view of these remarks, this application should be allowed and the case passed to issue.

Claims 1, 3-9, 14, and 16-18 are pending in this application. Claims 1, 3-9, 14, and 16-18 are rejected. Claims 2, 10-13, and 15 were previously canceled.

Claim Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claims 1, 3-8, 14, and 16-18 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Ohzuku et al. (Chemistry Letters, CL-010390, Vol. 30 (2001), No. 7, pp. 642-43) (CL '390) in view of Ohzuku (JP 2002-042813 (JP '813), relying upon English equivalent US 6,551,744 for translation). The Examiner found that CL '390 discloses a positive electrode material comprising $\text{LiCo}_{1/3}\text{Ni}_{1/3}\text{Mn}_{1/3}\text{O}_2$, and inherently discloses the crystalline properties. The Examiner further found that if the material of CL '390 were prepared according to the coprecipitation method of JP '813 the nickel, manganese, and cobalt would inherently be uniformly dispersed at the atomic level.

This rejection is traversed, and reconsideration and withdrawal thereof respectfully requested. The following is a comparison between the present invention, as claimed, and the cited prior art.

An aspect of the present invention, per claim 1, is a positive electrode active material comprising a lithium-containing composite oxide containing at least nickel and manganese elements, said positive electrode active material comprising primary particles of the composite oxide having a twining portion, the composite oxide further contains cobalt element, and the nickel, manganese, and cobalt elements are uniformly dispersed at the atomic level. The

composite oxide has a layered crystal structure and the arrangement of oxygen atoms is a cubic close-packed structure. The composite oxide contains nickel, manganese, and cobalt elements at a ratio satisfying $\text{Co} / (\text{Ni} + \text{Mn}) \leq 1$.

The positive electrode active material of the present invention is not suggested by the combination of CL '390 and JP '813, CL '390 and JP '813, whether taken alone or in combination, do not suggest the composite oxide having a **twining portion** and the composite oxide further containing cobalt element, and the nickel, manganese, and cobalt elements are **uniformly dispersed** at the atomic level, and the composite oxide has a layered crystal structure and the arrangement of oxygen atoms is a cubic close-packed structure, as required by claim 1.

“Twining portion” is defined in the present written description as the interface between crystal grains and between crystal domains within a primary particle (specification at page 12, lines 2-8) (see FIGs. 4 and 5). Due to the presence of the twining portion within the primary particle of the active material of the present invention, lithium ions can enter and leave the positive electrode active material in every direction (see specification at page 16, lines 2-21).

Although the positive electrode active material in accordance with the present invention has a layered structure similar to LiCoO_2 , lithium ions can enter and leave in every direction of the particle by satisfying either of the above-mentioned two points (i.e. (i) and (ii)) or both thereof. This greatly reduces the polarization resistance involved in mass transport of lithium ions. As a result, it is possible to realize an active material with excellent rate capacity

(Specification, page 16, lines 14-21).

In general, when Ni, Mn, and Co are dispersed in an atomic level, and the individual Ni and Mn atoms are adjacent each other, Ni is present in a bivalent state and Mn is present in a tetravalent state. Because the bonding strength between a metal atom and an oxygen atom is dependent on the valences of the atoms, the interatomic distances of Ni-O, Mn-O, and Co-O are all different from one another. However, when Ni, Mn, and Co are orderly arranged, for

example, in a crystal in which the crystal has sufficiently grown to form a superlattice, such differences in interatomic distances are well balanced.

In the present invention, rapid heating or rapid cooling (quenching) is performed in producing the particles. As disclosed in the present specification (page 28, lines 6-17):

In the method of producing the positive electrode active material in accordance with the present invention, an innovative control is performed during baking and cooling. Basically, rapid heating and quenching are performed in the present invention. It is preferred that rapid heating be performed at a rising temperature rate of not less than 7 °C/min and quenching be performed at a cooling rate of not less than 5 °C/min. Thereby, it is possible to control the grains within the primary particle as stated above. It is presumed that, when quenching is performed, oxygen loss occurs. Accordingly, it is preferred to perform heating treatment again at 700 to 750 °C in an air atmosphere.

The particle having experienced rapid heating or rapid cooling includes a number of interfaces between crystal grains and between crystal domains. The differences in the interatomic distances of Ni-O, Mn-O, and Co-O, as described above, are not balanced at these interfaces, causing the generation of distortion stress. This results in the occurrence of a twining portion, thereby to produce the effect of the present invention. As disclosed in the present specification (page 17, lines 16-26):

Such defect and disorder are essential in order to obtain an excellent active material in accordance with the present invention. In the active material having such defect and disorder, the lattice repeatedly expands and contracts during charging/discharging. The stress due to the expansion and contraction generally breaks down the lattice, contributing a decrease in cycle life. In the present invention, however, the defect and disorder in the lattice allow the stress due to the expansion and contraction of the lattice to be relieved, resulting in an improvement in cycle life.

Accordingly, when there is no difference in the interatomic distance of Me-O, for example, in a LiCoO₂ crystal, which contains only one metal element, no twining occurs. Neither CL '390 nor JP '813 teach rapid heating or rapid cooling. If rapid heating or rapid cooling is employed the grains or domains of the primary particle will grow sufficiently so

that twining would not likely occur, as the interatomic distances of Ni-O, Mn-O, and Co-O would be well balanced.

Ni-Mn based active material, such as in JP '813, correspond to Example 1-3 in Table 4 (specification at page 52). Example 1-4 corresponds to Ni-Mn-Co based active materials in CL '390. Examples 1-1 and 1-2, which are formed by rapid heating and rapid cooling exhibit unexpectedly improved rate performance and a cycle performance. For the Examiner's convenience, a portion of Table 4 is reproduced below.

Table 4

EX.	Composition	Electric capacity	Rate performance	25 °C cycle	Note
1-1	Li ₁ [Li _{0.03} (Ni _{1/2} Mn _{1/2}) _{0.97}]O ₂	107	93	81	Rapid heating/quenching
1-2	Li ₁ [Li _{0.03} (Ni _{1/3} Mn _{1/3} CO _{1/3}) _{0.97}]O ₂	111	95	80	Rapid heating/quenching
1-3	Li ₁ [Li _{0.03} (Ni _{1/2} Mn _{1/2}) _{0.97}]O ₂	104	88	72	No quenching
1-4	Li ₁ [Li _{0.03} (Ni _{1/3} Mn _{1/3} Co _{1/3}) _{0.97}]O ₂	105	89	70	No quenching

In view of the above, it is readily apparent that the cited references do not suggest the claimed twining portion. It is further clear that the cited references do not suggest the unexpected improvement in rate and cycle performance.

It is further submitted that the combination of CL '390 and JP '813 do not suggest that the cobalt, nickel, and manganese are inherently uniformly dispersed. The Examiner found that the combination of CL '390 and JP '813 inherently disclose the claimed material. However, the fact that a certain result or characteristic may occur or be present in the prior art is not sufficient to establish the inherency of that result or characteristic. *In re Rijckaert*, 9 F.3d 1531, 1534, 28 USPQ2d 1955, 1957 (Fed. Cir. 1993). "Inherency . . . may not be established by probabilities or possibilities. The mere fact that a certain thing may result from a given set of circumstances is not sufficient." *In re Robertson*, 169 F.3d 743, 745, 49 USPQ2d 1949, 1950-51 (Fed. Cir.

1999)(citations omitted). The principal of inherency is inapplicable to a combination of references. That which is asserted as inherent must be found in a single reference. The Office Action, however, alleges inherency based on a combination of references.

Obviousness can be established by combining or modifying the teachings of the prior art to produce the claimed invention where there is some teaching, suggestion, or motivation to do so found either in the references themselves or in the knowledge generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art. *In re Kahn*, 441 F.3d 977, 986, 78 USPQ2d 1329, 1335 (Fed. Cir. 2006); *In re Kotzab*, 217 F.3d 1365, 1370 55 USPQ2d 1313, 1317 (Fed. Cir. 2000); *In re Jones*, 958 F.2d 347, 21 USPQ2d 1941 (Fed. Cir. 1992); *In re Fine*, F.2d 1071, 5 USPQ2d 1596 (Fed. Cir. 1988). CL '390 and JP '813 do not suggest positive electrode active material comprising primary particles of the composite oxide having a **twining portion**, containing cobalt element, and the nickel, manganese, and cobalt elements are **uniformly dispersed** at the atomic level, and the composite oxide has a layered crystal structure and the arrangement of oxygen atoms is a cubic close-packed structure, as required by claim 1.

The only teaching of the claimed positive electrode active material comprising primary particles of the composite oxide having a **twining portion**, containing cobalt element, and the nickel, manganese, and cobalt elements are **uniformly dispersed** at the atomic level, and the composite oxide has a layered crystal structure and the arrangement of oxygen atoms is a cubic close-packed structure, is found in Applicants' disclosure. However, the teaching or suggestion to make a claimed combination and the reasonable expectation of success must not be based on applicant's disclosure. *In re Vaeck*, 947 F.2d 488, 20 USPQ2d 1438 (Fed. Cir. 1991).

Claim 9 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over CL '390 in view of JP '813 and Miyasaka (US 6,416,902). This rejection is traversed, and reconsideration and withdrawal thereof respectfully requested.

The combination of CL '390, JP '813, and Miyasaka do not suggest the claimed positive electrode active material because Miyasaka does not cure the deficiencies of CL '390 and JP '813. Miyasaka does not suggest the composite oxide having a **twining portion** and the composite oxide further containing cobalt element, and the nickel, manganese, and cobalt elements are **uniformly dispersed** at the atomic level, and the composite oxide has a layered crystal structure and the arrangement of oxygen atoms is a cubic close-packed structure, as required by claim 1.

The dependent claims are allowable for at least the same reasons as independent claim 1, and further distinguish the claimed positive electrode active material.

In view of the above remarks, Applicants submit that this application should be allowed and passed to issue. If there are any questions regarding this response or the application in general, a telephone call to the undersigned would be appreciated to expedite the prosecution of the application.

To the extent necessary, a petition for an extension of time under 37 C.F.R. § 1.136 is hereby made. Please charge any shortage in fees due in connection with the filing of this paper, including extension of time fees, to Deposit Account 500417 and please credit any excess fees to such deposit account.

Respectfully submitted,

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